# Alaska's Salmon Management

*A Story of Success*

Management programs and policies promote the sustainability of salmon stocks that are wild, abundant, and healthy. Alaska's world-famous salmon program is built on the principles of conservative management, sound science, and habitat protection. No salmon stocks of Alaska origin are listed as threatened or endangered.

## Alaska's Conservation Mandate

### Successful Salmon Management, In Law and in Practice

Conservation of salmon stocks is required under the Alaska state constitution. Alaska's constitution, unique among the 50 states, has an article solely devoted to the management and utilization of natural resources. The constitution mandates that renewable resources "shall be utilized, developed and maintained on the sustained yield principle."

Alaska law states: "The Commissioner shall manage, protect, maintain, improve, and extend the fish, game and aquatic plant resources of the state in the interest of the economy and general well being of the state...through rehabilitation, enhancement, and development programs, [the department must] do all things necessary to insure perpetual and increasing production and use of the food resources of state waters and continental shelf areas."

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game manages salmon fisheries, while the Alaska Board of Fisheries has responsibility for allocating the yield of salmon among users. The clear separation of management authority from allocation authority is one of the strengths of the Alaska management system. The "Sustainable Salmon Fisheries Policy" and other vital conservation management policies define the management program for protecting habitats and sustaining salmon, with priority for wild stocks.

In 1990, Alaska outlawed the farming of salmon to protect strong native stocks from hybridization, disease, pollution, and competition for food.

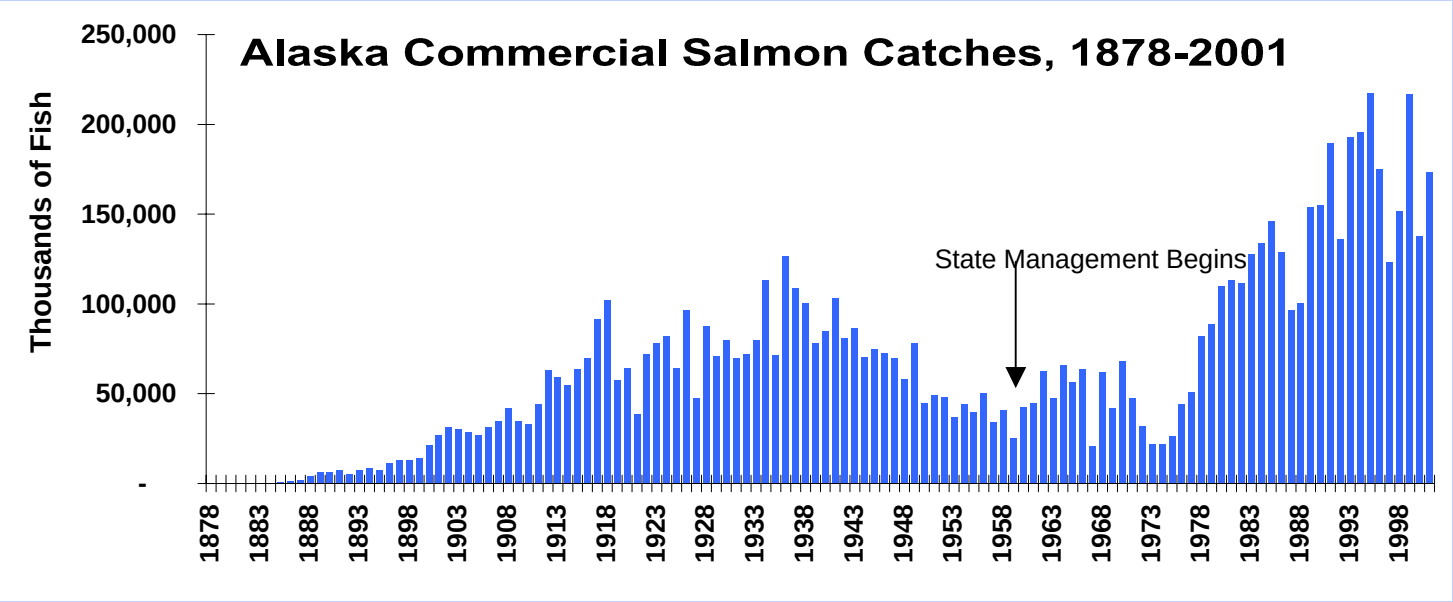
## Alaska's Environmental Record

### Protecting Salmon Habitat

Alaska has always made a strong commitment to conserving and protecting salmon habitats. ADF&G manages salmon in over 15,000 salmon spawning streams and rivers throughout the state.

Alaska's habitat conservation laws and regulations provide clean, free-flowing waterways vital to abundant, sustainable salmon production. There are very strict laws and regulations governing industry and development activities, such as road building, logging, and mining, to protect vital spawning and rearing salmon streams. The "Anadromous Fish Act" (AS 16.05.870) requires prior approval by ADF&G for any in-stream construction activities in salmon streams. Under Alaska's "Forest Practices Act" (41.17.010) buffer zones are required between logging areas and salmon streams to protect spawning and rearing habitats from erosion and other problems. The Commissioner of ADF&G may also acquire water rights to protect fish. Stream flow and volume, necessary for salmon migration and propagation, are protected under the "Water Use Protection Act" (AS 46.15,). In addition, Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) monitors and regulates the discharge of pollutants to ensure high water quality in both marine and fresh waters.

Alaska has been willing to forego the economic benefits from activities such as hydropower development in order to sustain salmon resources for future generations. For example, although the option of constructing and operating large-scale, hydropower facilities on both the Susitna River and the Yukon River were closely examined, neither was built. The wild salmon resource from these drainages was a major reason that Alaska chose the no-dam option.




## Management History

### Salmon Runs were not always bountiful:

Alaska did not always have healthy salmon stocks. Overfishing under federal management was a major factor in the declines of the Alaska salmon fishery that occurred between 1940 and the time of statehood, 1959. Salmon stocks and the fishing industry were in such bad shape that President Eisenhower declared Alaska a federal disaster area in 1953.

In 1959, statewide harvests totaled only about 25 million salmon - less than 20 percent of current sustained production. Over the last 20 years, sound state management with gradually increasing funding for research and management has rebuilt salmon runs from the dismal conditions inherited at statehood to the healthy levels experienced today. Alaska has been at the leading edge of salmon research.

## Alaska's Science-Based Management

### Letting the Managers Manage

With the constitutional and statutory conservation mandates, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has effectively managed Alaska's salmon stocks to ensure conservation and to promote sustainable production. As a result, stocks of salmon spawning in Alaska are healthy, and fisheries dependent upon these stocks have benefited, with statewide harvests ranging from about 100 to 200 million salmon per year over the past 15 years.

### In-Season Abundance Based Management:

State of Alaska management has been intensive, conducted on a real-time basis with regulations imposed in-season by local biologists who have a clear conservation mandate and authority to open or close fisheries as needed.

Delegated emergency authority provides for immediate management decisions by area biologists. When runs are strong, managers liberalize harvest regulations to utilize surpluses. When runs are poor, managers close fisheries to provide for predetermined escapement needs which ensure long-term sustainable yields.

Local biologists monitor returning salmon using various methods: aerial surveys, weirs, streamside counting towers, fish wheels, sonar, test fisheries, and input from fishermen. Based on their in-season abundance count, salmon managers open and close fisheries on a daily basis to ensure spawning escapements are adequate to sustain production.

Alaska's emphasis on in-season management to maintain adequate spawning escapements is the key ingredient to successful salmon management. This in-season abundance based management program was recently adopted by the Pacific Salmon Commission to manage and conserve salmon resources shared by Alaska, Oregon, Washington, and Canada.

ADF&G Fish Counting Tower

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